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We're thrilled to have RNC .. but still sighing over the Dems

It's Denver that will be the center of the drama

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Maybe it's too late for what-ifs. After all, we did woo the Republicans. They did pop the question first. The Twin Cities did agree to be their convention date.

Still, a great political drama is unfolding this year, spawning a convention that will pulse with passion and history. But it's not coming to St. Paul. It's in Denver.

We're hosting the other presidential convention. The one with almost no drama and very little buzz.

For the Twin Cities, it's like finally being invited to the royal ball but by the wrong prince.

But maybe our prince has regrets about us, too.

"If they had to do it over again, I think Republicans would rather be in Denver," said Steven Schier, a political science professor at Carleton College. Colorado "just seems to be a more competitive state for the fall."

Remember how this mystery date began?

Back in 2006, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Bloomington made an unusual bid for both national party conventions.

"They decided as a group that this isn't about politics, it's about business," said Erin Dady, St. Paul's director of convention planning. "It's a great chance to showcase our region to the world."

After months of courting, the Democratic Party finally took a shine to the Twin Cities. They said they liked us but couldn't commit. That's when the GOP surprised everyone by racing in and asking us first.

Back then, Republicans were Big Men On Campus, dominating Congress and the White House. But things have soured for the GOP, and now, our date is in a bit of a funk.

"The Republican Party is a mess right now; there's no question about it," said Sarah Janecek, a Republican and editor of Politics in Minnesota. Still, she's hopeful the party will pull it together and is confident the Twin Cities are poised for a great show — worldwide attention, visitors galore, wall-to-wall VIPs and the excitement a national convention brings.

"Most people don't understand how big this thing

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really is," Janecek said. "I think a lot of downtown (St. Paul) will be blocked for security reasons. It's momentous when Minneapolis and St. Paul become the world stage for four days."

Mike Erlandson, former chairman of Minnesota's Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, agrees.

"From a community perspective, it's great to have either one of them here," he said. "To host a national convention, it's like hosting the Olympics. It's just one of those once-in-a-lifetime events."

They just aren't identical events, as it turned out. Throughout the 2008 campaign, Americans have been far more interested in the Democratic race, pollsters find.

Thanks to the precedent-shattering race between Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama, Denver is winning the buzz contest in a landslide. Just do a Google search.

More than 2 million Web sites mention the words "Democrat 2008 convention Denver." That's almost 10 times the mentions for the Republican convention.

Who cares about buzz? Actually, we do. It was a huge reason Twin Cities officials wanted to host a political convention: so the world would check us out and talk us up.

"In terms of generating national and international exposure for the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, hosting a national political convention would be beyond our wildest dreams," said Karolyn Kerichgesler of St. Paul's convention and visitor authority, back in 2006.

Paul Maccabee, a Twin Cities' public relations executive, says both political conventions will draw

tidal waves of attention, but he agrees Denver's will generate more.

"There's no question Barack Obama is a rock star — he is the single most charismatic figure the Democrats have had since JFK," said Maccabee, a Democrat. "No matter how much one admires (Sen. John) McCain, the passion, the stardust, is on Obama."

"Now, would it be nice to have the Democratic convention here?" Maccabee asks. He doesn't even bother to answer, then continues. "It's such a big thing to have any political convention land in St. Paul."

That's how the Twin Cities have viewed it. The cities have spruced up, donated millions of corporate dollars, extended bar hours and planned parties. Our convention facilities are drawing raves. By all accounts, preparations are going well.

So well that our convention rival, Denver, is a little jealous. Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper recently explained why their fundraising has been slower than ours.

"You've got to look at (the fact that) Denver's got seven Fortune 500 companies," the mayor told Congressional Quarterly. "That's one-third the number Minneapolis has."

Pardon us if we smirk. Maybe Denver does have the hotter date. We've got the money.

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